

ABC NIGHTLINE  
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KOPPEL: Good evening. I'm Ted Koppel and this is Nightline. Gennadi Gerasimov is a Soviet political analyst and political commentator for the Soviet News Agency Novosti. He is with us tonight live from Moscow. Ambassador Jeane Kirkpatrick is the United States representative at the United Nations. She is with us tonight live from New York. Our topic: today's acknowledgment by the Soviet Union that it did indeed, in the Soviets' words, 'terminate' Korean Air Lines Flight 007.

KOPPEL: The Soviets have finally admitted in very circumspect language that their military did indeed shoot down that Korean airliner. But why remains something of a mystery. The Soviets charge that the plane was involved in some kind of U.S. espionage attempt. That may sound compelling in Moscow, but here in Washington, even among officials of previous administrations with no love for Ronald Reagan, the charge is dismissed as unconvincing. There is believed to be little or nothing that could be learned through the use of that Korean 747 that couldn't be more efficiently learned through satellites, listening posts or military reconnaissance aircraft, which would seem to suggest that the Soviets are guilty of incredible brutality, unbelievable incompetence, or possibly both. Joining us live now to discuss those possibilities or some others I may have overlooked are, from New York, Washington's ambassador to the United Nations, Jeane Kirkpatrick, and from Moscow, Gennadi Gerasimov, analyst and commentator for the Soviet news agency Novosti. Mr. Gerasimov, I would assume that you have some other explanation. Why was the plane shot down? GENNADI GERASIMOV (Soviet Political Analyst): Well, the plane was shot down because it was in the Soviet airspace and the pilot didn't know it was, it was a civilian air, airliner.

KOPPEL: Does it surprise you to learn that there have been some Soviet aircraft in American airspace and they have not been shot down for the simple reason that most civilized nations do not do that, especially when dealing with a civilian aircraft? GERASIMOV: Well, I don't about the cases that the Soviet airlines were, uh, were, un-, un-, unidentified and, uh, were stopped in American airspace. I don't know about this accident. The problem with it with this particular accident is that the, the Soviet pilot didn't recognize that it was a civilian plane. And it was, uh, over, as they say in the, uh, the statement of the Soviet government which was announced yesterday, the plane was over, and now I quote from, uh, Pravda newspaper, uh, 'the most important base of strategic forces of the Soviet Union.'

KOPPEL: Mr. Gerasimov... GERASIMOV: Maybe this is the explanation.

KOPPEL: Uh, I'm no pilot and obviously no expert on the silhouettes of aircraft, but I suspect that... GERASIMOV: Well, the Soviet Union...

KOPPEL: I suspect that even you would know the difference between a 747, uh, and, uh, a reconnaissance aircraft. They don't look anything like each other, at least not by visual sightings. GERASIMOV: I don't know how the, how the reconnaissance, uh, RC-135...

KOPPEL: ...135. It looks very much like a Boeing 707. GERASIMOV: I don't know how it looks like. Uh, I do know how Boeing 747 looks like. I was flying on it. But,

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